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September 19, 2006

The Honorable Carlos M. Gutierrez
Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th & Constitution Ave. NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

I have obtained a series of emails from the Department of Commerce that suggest that officials on your staff tried to suppress a federal scientist from discussing the link between global warming and hurricanes. I am writing to learn more about this matter.

One email in the series reveals that the CNBC show *On the Money* requested an on air interview with NOAA scientist Tom Knutson on October 19, 2005, in order to discuss whether global warming was contributing to the number or intensity of hurricanes.¹ Dr. Knutson is a research meteorologist with NOAA's Climate Dynamics and Prediction Group in the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory. Dr. Knutson's research concludes that global warming may lead to an increasing risk in the occurrence of highly destructive category-5 storms.²

CNBC's request was forwarded from NOAA to Chuck Fuqua in your office.³ Mr. Fuqua is currently a press officer. He used to be the Director of Media Operations for the 2004 Republican National Convention.⁴

Upon receiving the request, Mr. Fuqua emailed back to NOAA, "what is Knutson's position on global warming vs. decadal cycles? is he consistent with Bell and Landsea?"⁵ Dr.

¹ Email from Chuck Fuqua, Department of Commerce, to Kent Laborde, NOAA (Oct. 19, 2005).

² Tom Knutson's homepage (online at http://www.gfdl.noaa.gov/~tk/glob_warm_hurr.html).

³ Fuqua email, Note 1.

⁴ See, i.e., Democracy in Action, the Republican National Convention 2004 (online at <http://www.gwu.edu/~action/2004/convs/rconvorg.html>).

Gerry Bell is NOAA's chief hurricane forecast scientist. In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Bell stated at a NOAA press conference that the intensity of the storm was "not related to greenhouse warming."⁶ Chris Landsea is a research meteorologist with the Hurricane Research Division of the Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory in Miami. Like Dr. Bell, he has vocally questioned the connection between hurricanes and global warming.⁷

NOAA responded to Mr. Fuqua that Dr. Knutson projected a "very small increase in hurricane intensity" due to increased greenhouse gas pollution.⁸ Mr. Fuqua responded, "why can't we have one of the other guys then?"⁹

This apparently ended the matter. NOAA's Daily Media Tracking Log states that the request for the interview with Dr. Knutson was subsequently denied.¹⁰

In February 2006, Dr. Knutson told the *Wall Street Journal* that he felt censored by the Administration because of his view that global warming could be making hurricanes worse.¹¹ At the time, the Administration claimed that it did not censor government scientists. This email exchange raises serious doubts about the Administration's assurances.

If accurate, this email exchange appears to be an example of press officials in the Department of Commerce blocking federal scientists from discussing their research with the news media. To learn more about this issue, I am making the following requests for further information:

1. Please provide all internal documents or communications that describe or discuss the Administration's position regarding the scientific issue of the connection between global warming and hurricanes from August 1, 2005, to the present.

⁵ Fuqua email, Note 1.

⁶ *The Government's Junk Science. NOAA's Flood*, The New Republic (Feb. 20, 2006).

⁷ See Global Warming Link to Hurricane Intensity Questioned, National Geographic News (July 28, 2006) (online at <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2006/07/060728-hurricane-warming.html>).

⁸ Fuqua email, Note 1.

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¹⁰ NOAA Daily Media Tracking Log (Oct. 19, 2005).

¹¹ *Statement Acknowledges Some Government Scientists See Link to Global Warming*, Wall Street Journal (Feb. 16, 2006).

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2. Please explain the role of your office in determining which scientists could speak with the press regarding global warming from August 1, 2005, to the present.

I respectfully request that this information be provided by October 9, 2006.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Henry A. Waxman", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member